

LIFELONG EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract

Close observation of the world's development and progression during the last few decades, reveals to us drastic changes in all domains including educational fields. No longer is education bounded to certain privileged groups or loci, as it was in earlier times. It is now available at our doorsteps and its rigidity has changed due to increasing flexibility. Globalization has empowered people towards lifelong learning. Hence, lifelong education together with formal and informal learning (blended learning) helps to improve standard of living. This paper seeks to investigate the need for such an education, the obstacles to it, and its implementation at world level. We hope it could shed light on the related issues and help overcome the hindering factors.

Introduction

Over the last few decades, lifelong learning has enjoyed a remarkable rise as one of the most significant strategic focuses for policy makers all over the world. It is not only presented as the latest big idea, but also has been considered as the ultimate solution to a great number of profound issues. In recent times, knowledge has appeared as the key factor with utopian expectation in a great variety of fields, including politics, business and a new concern for education, schools, universities and research could be easily distinguished. Today we can establish the idea of “The knowledge revolution” or “Victory goes to the smartest nations” as our motto in almost all aspect of everyday life. The emerging knowledge society can be conceptualized as the one with lifelong learning as its inevitable and fundamental feature. That is, a shift of pedagogical focus from the instructor to the individual, autonomous learner, and second, that learning is a life wide as well as life long process. From this perspective, it is not difficult to understand why numerous voices are asking for heavy investments in science and education- the same infrastructures that have previously experienced a long period of neglect and underinvestment (Newsweek 2006). This presentation seeks to tap the globalization and its interaction with lifelong learning, and the involved issues and finally some implications for English language learning.

Lifelong education and Globalization

As stated by most scholars in the field, lifelong learning or education is today expected to be the big solution, but let's see what kind of problem it is supposed to solve? What has caused its emergence now and it is made to sound like a free offer, when in reality we are all forced to reconfigure our lives according to this logic? To answer such questions, we need to go far beyond the traditional arenas of education.

Lifelong learning was originally presented as a multidimensional concept stressing political, social, personal as well as cultural and economic purposes alike. It has often been recognized as an integral part

of a strong democratic commitment concerning the importance of Equal Opportunities. However, today it is no exaggeration to state that the focus is shifted to the scale of breathtaking pace of current economic and social change. Lifelong learning, in fact, has come to be the most important strategy to cope with the challenges from the globalization process by supporting a rapid transition to a knowledge based economy (Banks,J. 2004). The goal is presently, economic related, having changed its center of gravity from educational to industrial departments, in order to promote the skills and competencies, general capabilities and specific performance in the work place as a source of competitive advantage in the hypercompetitive world of globalization (Friedman,T. 2005).

Despite some criticisms about the global consensus on lifelong learning, it can be identified as a core element in the strategy set out to make nations and individuals the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based beings. The agenda is that the implementation of lifelong education can serve as a tool enabling us to cope with the challenges brought about by globalization. This kind of flexibility permits us to easily adjust to the upcoming changes and makes us more creative.

This new identity stands in sharp contrast with the traditional life narrative which was encouraging the linear sequence education- working- retirement. Lifelong learning does not only mean life encompassing learning, it also means that learning involves and includes everyone. Several factors are responsible for the phenomenon, the most important of which is the new infrastructures of communication supported by information technology (Clarke, k.M., & Thomas, D.A., Eds., 2006). As a consequence, the distinction between private life and professional life has tended to diminish.

The need for individuals to incorporate the new strategy in their lives cause them to adapt to a situation of constant changes which demand flexibility. The ultimate goal can be summarized to “ an autonomous, enterprising , self choosing and self regulating individual” who takes responsibility for his own life by becoming a lifelong learner.

Although in the age of globalization, flexibility is a must for survival, it is, nevertheless insufficient to realize a sustainable capacity for innovation. The idea of innovation can be seen as the new religion of the late modern societies, in which we are all supposed to become creative individuals through lifelong education. That is, knowledge is handled in a creative, non productive way of strategic importance. To become a serious player in a game, it is not sufficient to be just a consumer; one must also become a producer- a producer of knowledge in this case.

So the new class divide in the knowledge society is manifested as a cleavage between those who are creative and produce new knowledge and those who just reproduce and administrate the existing knowledge, or the “ knowledge proletarian ”. In such situations, we easily observe the emerging privileged group of professionals who are making successful careers by their capability of combining the creative competence with the ability to connect and integrate it with successful value creating network constellations. But the mere flexibility is insufficient, because it reconfigure only the personal identity and self cultivation. Lack of capability of acting on and interpreting other people, cause them to become the victim of destabilization and determination. In these situations, recourse to hermeneutics is advisable.

Globalization and Hermeneutics: Horizontal or Vertical Thinking

Initially we can pose the question: What does globalization have to do with hermeneutics? From a historical viewpoint, it is certainly a good question. Traditionally, hermeneutics has not been at all compatible with the areas in which globalization is associated. In late 19th century, interpretation was introduced into epistemological discourse as a defense for the methodological status of human sciences. Distinction was made between *Verstehen* (Understanding), and *Erklaren* (Nature) (Brown, J.s. & Duguid, P., 2000). The rationale behind the emergence of hermeneutics was to create an atmosphere against the Single Reality and establish decolonization in interpretation. Accordingly, what causes the growing awareness about the interpretive character of our perceptions of reality and the inevitable conflicts of interpretations, was technological and geopolitical transformation of society.

We know that the experience that everything is increasingly possible to interpret, and that the emergence of all the conflicting interpretations no longer originates from a separate life world, nor from the methodological discussion in academic seminars. Today we are living in the age of hermeneutics, where the rise of numerous and conflicting interpretations are aided by the main transformation of the world, i.e., the globalization process. Now, let's touch on some of the logics connected to the globalization process that generated the mould for interpretations or hermeneutics today (ibid.)

First, the rapid transition from a former situation marked by a shortage of data and info to our present state of information explosion which demand hermeneutical competence. Today, the web of info is constantly giving rise to thoughts, but info itself does not think. In order to arrive at a configuration of meaningful knowledge, interpretation is necessary.

Second, through the digitalized, global information systems, the old stable hierarchies of meaning, identities and truth are being destroyed, dissolving traditional canons of art, value and knowledge. All the info is ordered horizontally, which release a multitude of conflicting interpretations. Flexible principles of knowledge organization is increasingly followed and promoted.

Third, the new info logic is fundamentally Glocal (Global-Local), i.e., the tension between a global distribution of data and its corresponding reception is being declined. In this situation, the universal and the contextual can not any longer be understood as mutually exclusive concepts, but inter-related and connected in the same glocal logic. Therefore, the friction generated by the permanent tension between the abstract global Net and the concrete local situation of reception results in an explosion of interpretations (DiCenso, J. 1990).

Fourth, the Internet and WWWs as convergent technologies of info are reshaping the fundamental principles of communication. Everything is continuously recontextualized and reinterpreted as new links are added to the infrastructures of information. Internet can now be considered as a model of new info logic with its center-less and historically contingent character- far away from platonic essentialism and the quest for underlying natures (Suz-Orozco, M., & Sattin, C. 2007).

Certainly, globalization today paves the way for hermeneutics and generates a mould for endless plurality of available perspectives. In addition to flexibility, reflexivity is also required. If we take flexibility as endless variation of perspectives, consistent with a world standardization where everything is convertible due to the principles of adaptation, then reflexivity could be defined as a more complex model of finite

variation, connected to the capacity of being responsible for the continuous process of self cultivation and arbitrary thinking. Here, the concept of lifelong learner comes into play, we explain in the following section.

Who is a Lifelong Learner?

As demonstrated, the predominant virtue of flexibility in a society characterized by the transformative logic of globalization, together with the vague perception of hermeneutics as a mere horizontal thinking mode, creates the most destructive fears that are threatening the modern societies. The solution, as recommended was both flexibility and reflexivity for economic, social and cultural interactive resources. In such a situations, cohesion in individual life strain can serve as a prerequisite and lifelong learning and education can help its materialization.

In different stages of this journey, we arrive on a new continent in which globalization opens up a landscape of interpretations in which a myriad of activities are made possible. To be able to strengthen the resources for cultivating meaning and identities within the framework of lifelong learning, we should shift our focus and interests from what lifelong learning is to the question of who the lifelong learner is. In other words, we should recognize "being someone" from "being adaptable" (Coffield,F, 2002).

It is important to emphasize that the role models for identity formation- flexibility and reflexivity- are not symmetric. These two aspects together make individuals both accountable and responsible or a "hermeneutics of selfhood". In short, the flexibility depicts a human being as someone who has cut all links with the past. In contrast, the hermenutical informed reflexivity is based on dynamic perception.

Considering the aforementioned facts about the globalization process and the demands on the part of learners, we can summarize the characteristics of lifelong learners as individuals with these capacities: promoting connections and communications with others; obtaining consistent and updated messages; trying to utilize the technologies in a better and more fruitful way; fostering independent habits for learning and reference; improving performance and controlling costs.

The next question related to "who a lifelong learner is", to be posed is if lifelong learning can really improve their learning? From a theoretical perspective, there are several reasons to think it should be, and to start with, one would expect more robust learning, given the redundancy available in lifelong learning. According to cognitive theories, articulating the same ideas in different modes, and across different contexts and from different perspectives, should lead to the creation of mental models or schemata that are more flexible and that facilitates retrieval from memory (Collis,B. , Bruijstens,H., & Van der veen,J.K. 2003). All in all, the following could be the reasons why lifelong learning is encouraged in all domains and educational arenas:

1. It reduces the costs (reduce the time spent in the classroom; reduce training period)
2. It delivers training in a shorter period (by introducing self-paced, independent study components)
3. It provides more flexible learning models for learners to increase the rate of learning, improve motivation, and thus increase uptake of training

4. It aligns training with business objectives and increase the transfer to other fields
5. It manages change
6. It accommodates different learning styles.
7. It helps improve pedagogy (most traditional non-lifelong learning focus on transmissive rather than interactive strategies). In lifelong learning, the individuals can utilize the most effective strategy suited to their own characteristics and absorb the materials independent of outside factors. At the same time, they can create an interactive atmosphere to negotiate with others the learning materials at their own selected pace (Gustavsson,B.2002).
8. It increases access and facilities (flexibility and convenience are also of growing importance as more mature individuals with outside commitment seek additional education).
9. It increases cost effectiveness (Cost effectiveness is of paramount importance in all education levels. Life long education can provide an opportunity for reaching a large, globally dispersed audience in a short period of time with consistent, content delivery. Therefore, it can provide a big return on the investment and by implementing such education, we can have also quality enhancements and cost saving simultaneously).
10. It can strike a balance between innovation and production

Strengths and weaknesses of lifelong learning

Let's first pinpoint the strengths of lifelong education. Briefly as stated above, the advantages can be encapsulated in Flexibility, Participation and Depth of reflection. That is, learners can contribute to their own learning at anytime and any place most convenient to them. All the learners can participate in interactive activities, irrespective of time and place constraints. Finally, the learners can more carefully consider and provide deeper, more thoughtful reflections (European Commission 2001).

The weaknesses attributed to the new system of education include its Spontaneity, i.e., it does not encourage the generation of rapid chain of associated ideas and serendipitous discoveries. Second, it is Procrastination, i.e., there may be a tendency toward un-motivation of the learners, because of no social presence and excitement. The last but not the least, is Human Connection. The system is considered to be impersonal, which may cause a lower satisfaction level with learning process.

Implications for English Language Education

Social, technological, cultural, political and ecological spheres across the globe make the empowered individuals communicate across other boundaries, as citizens of the world. People have access to new technologies that afford then unprecedented ways to re-interpret, appropriate, contest and negotiate mass distributed materials in multiple forms. Such global interaction force a heightened sensitivity to the audience with varying positions, and necessitate an examination of underlying assumptions and beliefs that frame intercultural communications. English educators all over the world, need to equip their learners with a knowledge of global literacy and critical awareness of how globalization defines and positions their language, symbols, identities, communities and their future (Kress,G. 2003).

Central to the concerns of globalization in English education, are differing interpretations, contesting ideologies, and struggles between frames for the meanings. Drawing on hermeneutics, we no longer believe that a rose in the garden, in a box with eleven others, pinned to clothing, white, red, or yellow, all stand for the same entity, and interpretation of it depends on the social context or frame of reference.

Uncovering such big differences among the members of the global community, learning to collaborate and co-develop collective knowledge, understanding and experiences, as well as respecting and celebrating their diverse ideas and perspectives, will need to become the core principles of online and offline communication. Fostering such principles in innovative English teaching and in virtual environment will help us to be accountable to the global community through a commitment to high quality communication and lifelong learning (Luke,A. Luke,C., & Graham,P. 2007).

Due to the above mentioned issues and facts, teaching language is progressively becoming more complex. As the technologies make global communication and collaboration more ubiquitous, teachers are being forced to change the way they instruct their pupils. No longer it is acceptable to teach just the established literature, by a single discourse which just seek more homogeneous identity. Instead, 21st century educators must broaden their horizons and align their teaching with real life multicultural, multimodal communication needs of their students who increasingly live and work in a globalized society. Through such critical education and therefore, critical thinking, students will have access to unprecedented ways to re-interpret, appropriate and negotiate texts in order to participate in local and global communities (Martyn,M. 2003).

In sum, today's learners are required to actively address the problems that could have widespread and long term consequences for themselves and their world. In order to become efficient problem solver, they should be able to think with clarity, imagination and empathy. Lifelong globalized instruction is one avenue through which such contemporary critical thinking may be generated. Global rhetorical approaches to multimedia representations, can pave the path for the aim, which is thinking both critically and globally in the world.

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